

Testimony of Corey Mason
CEO of Dallas Safari Club and Dallas Safari Club Foundation
Before the
House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Federal Lands
Legislative Hearing on HR 1614
March 28th, 2023

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on HR 1614, the Range Access Act. I am Corey Mason, the CEO of Dallas Safari Club and Dallas Safari Club Foundation. DSC and DSCF are United States-based conservation organizations that work with Wildlife Ministries and Departments worldwide to promote science-based wildlife management and conservation programs. DSC and DSCF award millions of dollars in annual conservation grants to support wildlife research, habitat management, and other support programs that work to reduce human-wildlife conflict abroad. Domestically, we have funded projects to support State Wildlife Agencies conservation initiatives, including bighorn sheep, mule deer, pronghorn, habitat restoration and connectivity, and water development. Additionally, we have supported many programs to educate and inform youth and the public on wildlife conservation principles and needs.

In addition to my duties as DSC and DSCF CEO, I also serve as a board member for the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, Frontline Foundation Board, Texas Advisory Committee for mule deer, whitetail deer and desert bighorn sheep, am a member of International Union for Conservation of Nature's Sustainable Use and Livelihoods Group and I am a Certified Wildlife Biologist®. Previously, I worked for Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, where I served as regional director, program leader and management area biologist.

These experiences have shown me how important public shooting ranges are to help ensure safe and competent shooters and ethical, skilled hunters in the US. This is especially true in the western United States where there is a great deal of federal land and yet very few places available to practice target shooting, range safety and etiquette or sight in a rifle. As is the case with most sports, the more one practices, the better one gets. The more American gunowners have access to low or no-cost shooting areas, the more competent they become. The more hunters have access to low or no-cost shooting areas, the better their marksmanship and the more ethical they are while hunting. While there may be debates over firearm ownership, I think we can all agree that having safe, experienced, and skilled firearm owners in America is incredibly important. This bill will help to achieve this goal.

As a conservation organization that is funded and supported by hunters, you may wonder why we are testifying in support of a bill that would help create more ranges on federal lands. The answer to that question goes back to 1937 when Congress passed the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act—known today as Pittman Robertson. This law has generated over \$15 billion to fund wildlife conservation, habitat enhancement, hunter education and build shooting ranges in the US. While I was at Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, I saw the incredible impact of this funding firsthand. Using Pittman Robertson

funds, state conservation agencies employ wildlife biologists, technicians, and researchers to conduct wildlife surveys, manage state owned lands, meet with private landowners to develop management plans, conduct needed research, and perform habitat projects. Turkeys are restored, waterfowl and shorebird habitat is created and maintained, and bighorn sheep habitat is conserved across mountain ranges.

What most people do not realize is this funding is generated through an excise tax on firearms, ammunition and archery equipment—whether or not the person purchasing the firearm or ammunition hunts, the excise tax is applied, and that funding is then distributed by the Fish and Wildlife Service to states.

The results have been an overwhelming success. Whitetail deer, prevalent across most of the US, were once in serious trouble, but have gone from a low of 300,000 to now over 30 million. The same story is true for hundreds of game and non-game species: from black bears to alligators and wild turkey to elk, the Pittman Robertson fund has enabled state fish and wildlife agencies to conserve these species for all Americans to enjoy. Further, the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act also authorized the construction and maintenance of shooting ranges and hunter education courses. Hunter education certification is required in the United States to ensure that all hunters are safe and ethical.

I also must mention a disastrous bill introduced last Congress—the RETURN Act (Repealing Excise Tax on Unalienable Right Now), which would repeal the Pittman Robertson excise tax. This would leave state fish and wildlife agencies with no way to fund conservation, hunter education or shooting ranges. While this is not the topic of today's hearing, I sincerely hope that this committee will oppose any attempt to move this bill forward, as it would be the demise of wildlife conservation in North America.

Back to HR 1614, this bill helps to solve a more modern problem. As the country grows and more and more people move to suburbs, wildland urban interface and cities expand, many times a shooting range that used to be on the outskirts of town is now no longer welcome in newly constructed residential areas. Combine this with the lack of private land in many western states, and firearm owners have little opportunity to practice. For many, in our fast-paced lives between working, raising a family and other obligations, there is little time left to drive an hour or two one-way to an already-crowded range. This is truly where National Forests and Bureau of Land Management lands can make a huge and meaningful difference. The Forest Service manages almost 190 million acres and the BLM manages almost 260 million acres for the American people. With 450 million acres under management, the agencies should be able to easily identify areas where shooting ranges could safely be constructed while still meeting other multiple-use mandates.

The most important link between this bill and hunting and conservation is the future of Pittman Robertson funding. Currently, this fund is 100% dependent on firearm, ammunition, and archery equipment purchases. No general fund or taxpayer dollars contribute to this funding. Without hunters, shooters and archers, the wildly successful conservation programs built across America by state fish and wildlife agencies cease to exist. Additionally, it only seems fair that the PR fund, funded by taxes on firearms, ammo, and archery equipment, also provides a place for these purchasers to practice. For these reasons, the Dallas Safari Club and DSC Foundation strongly supports the Range Access Act and encourages the Committee to pass the bill.

Thank you.